

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS IN SCOTLAND —
THE ROLE OF THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

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Public support for the arts began during the 1939-45 war with the creation of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). After the war CEMA was replaced by the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), whose remit, as its title implies, extended to Scotland. In 1945, to facilitate its activities in Scotland, ACGB established a committee in Edinburgh which, from 1967, became known as the Scottish Arts Council (SAC). SAC has remained a committee of ACGB, and its chairman and two other members have always been members of ACGB.

The Government, through its education ministry (currently the Department of Education and Science) makes its grant for the support of the arts in the whole of Great Britain to ACGB. ACGB customarily agrees with SAC for a percentage of this grant, based on need, for Scotland (and similarly with WAC for Wales). SAC then has the disposal of this amount entirely at its discretion, subject only to the usual requirements of government accountability and auditing. Thus, in the financial year (1 April to 31 March) 1976-77, the grant made available by DES to ACGB for the support of the arts was £36m. Of this, £4.4m., or approximately 12%, was allocated to SAC. 12%, of course, represents more than Scotland's proportion of the total British population (currently about 9%), the difference being added partly to allow for the higher costs of artists' travel to Scotland's dispersed population, but more particularly in recognition of the

* The views expressed in this article are the author's and not those of the Scottish Arts Council. They are necessarily related to the experience of the Music Committee, and examples and illustrations used in this article are heavily drawn from the work of that committee.

indivisibility of certain basic units like opera and ballet companies and symphony orchestras. Scotland has one each of these, but England, with eleven times the Scottish population, does not need eleven opera companies or even eleven symphony orchestras.

These grants are for current expenditure. The Government, however, also makes some capital available to ACGB for "Housing the Arts", and this is disbursed on a British basis by an ACGB committee on which SAC is represented. "Housing the Arts" capital grants have assisted in the building or improvement of many theatres and galleries in Scotland — the Eden Court Theatre in Inverness, and the MacRobert Centre in Stirling are recent examples of buildings substantially assisted by "Housing the Arts" capital grants. Where very large capital expenditures are involved, as in the adaptation of the Theatre Royal in Glasgow by Scottish Opera as an opera house, or — abortively, in the event — the erstwhile Castle Terrace "opera house" project in Edinburgh, the Government will consider direct applications for "jumbo" capital grants.

Table I

EXPENDITURE BY SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL 1976-77

Music	600,439	13%
Opera	1,155,437	25%
Dance	455,500	10%
Drama	887,602	19%
Stage 1	61,043	1%
Art	357,790	8%
Films	14,925	—%
Literature	126,902	3%
Festivals	230,001	5%
Projects, Arts Centres and Clubs	275,605	6%
Operating Costs	256,289	6%
Capital Expenditure	64,937	1%
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	4,486,470	97%
Housing the Arts	128,500	3%
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	£4,614,970	100%

Table 1 shows the ways the Council spent its grant in 1976-77. These amounts and percentages should be treated with caution. There are reasons why art forms are not equally costly.

There is no reason why the Council's help to projects should be a fixed part of their costs. The categories are not mutually exclusive and government money is channelled into the arts via other agencies, notably local government, education, art galleries and libraries. Nonetheless, the table gives a useful general picture.

The Scottish Arts Council consists of 22 unpaid members appointed by the ACGB and approved by the Secretary of State for Scotland. They are drawn from a wide range of occupations — artists, writers and performers in the arts, businessmen, public administrators, trade unionists, academics and other professionals. All have an interest in, or knowledge of, one or more art form, either professionally, or simply as enthusiasts: those of them who are not professional artists are as representative a group of the artistically informed public as it would be possible to find by any means. For purposes of the detailed consideration of the allocation of the overall grant, SAC divides itself into specialist committees for each principal art form — music, drama, art and literature. In each of these areas the Council is assisted by its professional staff. There are Directors with small (mostly two or three only) staffs for each of the four specialist departments, small "regional development", "tours" and financial departments, the whole under a Director and Deputy Director. In 1976-77, administration accounted for only 6% of the total expenditure.

With certain exceptions, principally in the field of art exhibitions, SAC operates by responding to external initiatives from both individuals and organisations which, where necessary, are solicited by advertisement. There are good reasons for working this way. First, for SAC to launch out into, say, concert promotion or the publication of the work of living Scottish poets would call for a much larger staff: the proportion of the total grant eaten up by administration might rise to unacceptably high levels. Second, and more important, the transfer of the initiative for the expenditure of a significant proportion of the total grant to the Council itself would impose on it a responsibility for determining the direction of development in the arts which many, including SAC itself, would consider to be undesirable. Both ACGB and SAC have studiously eschewed any attempt to dictate the directions in which the arts should develop in order to allow maximum freedom of expression by

artists and promoters. "There should be no question", SAC's chairman said in the 1977 House of Lords debate on the arts, "of the Scottish Arts Council imposing a cultural policy from Edinburgh". This, it should be noted, is in marked contrast with forms of state aid to the arts in many countries where financial assistance in cash terms is more generous. It remains the case, however, that the Council and its officers are peculiarly well-placed to observe the *lacunae* left by independent initiative, and the Council has always shown a willingness to stimulate and encourage local, or even national initiative.

It goes without saying that in any year SAC's grant falls a long way short of what is needed to respond adequately to external initiatives. For the Council supports an astonishingly wide range of activities. New members joining the Council are invariably surprised to discover the scope of activities supported, and even the Council's annual report fails to do justice to the variety and ingenuity of methods of support and encouragement. It supports, to an extent sometimes in excess of 50% of their entire revenues, major opera and ballet companies of international reputation; a contracted symphony orchestra; a free-lance medium-scale symphony orchestra, a chamber orchestra and a chamber ensemble under unified management; a full-time string quartet; an international festival and several smaller local festivals; nearly one hundred widely scattered local music and general arts clubs; seven repertory theatre companies and several smaller touring drama companies; many art galleries and centres; and a mobile art gallery. In addition, it provides the chief, if not the sole, source of finance for the commissioning of musical compositions and the writing of plays, for bursaries for artists, writers, and young musicians and dancers, for awards for artists and writers "in residence" in schools, universities, new towns and hospitals, for the publication of poetry and other literature, for the encouragement of the art of film-making, and for the training of producers, designers, instrument repairers and tuners.

With so many competing claims on limited resources, how does SAC decide on its priorities? In part, history comes to the rescue. Once having made possible the launching of a repertory company, a string quartet or an opera company by an initial grant, it would be difficult not to continue at least the same level of support in the following years: to discontinue support

that might run to, say, between 25% and 50% of a company's budget would mean almost certain death for that company. Thus, a new major initiative becomes, almost inevitably, a permanent commitment. Not that SAC can ever guarantee continuing support. First, it must, in the public interest, satisfy itself about standards, not only artistic, but also managerial and financial. Second, SAC itself is not guaranteed revenue for years ahead. Before inflation soared in the early 1970s, a system of rolling triennial grants gave some assurance of future levels of grant; but in the face of higher rates of inflation, governments have retreated to annual grants, often announced extremely late. Though there has never in recent years been any serious possibility of the grant being reduced in money terms, in a period of fast inflation what matters is whether the level of grant is maintained in real terms. If it is not, some potential recipients of grants must be disappointed. SAC must safeguard its position by not accepting forward commitments beyond its foreseeable means, which indeed is not permitted by Treasury regulation. The Council's grant was raised by 14.6% for 1977-78 and by 20% for 1978-79. This latter increase should cover inflation and allow for very limited growth in the Council's awards.

Once reassured about standards, SAC is as anxious as anybody to ensure the continuation of a going concern. With only a few exceptions, organisations, once launched, tend not only to stay in existence but also to grow. Thus, a large organisation whose launching initially claimed, say, 1% of SAC's revenue for that year, is likely to go on claiming at least as much in future unless the Council's total grant from ACGB increases in real terms. Many such organisations also wish to expand as time goes on, and their expansion may therefore involve either a constant percentage of an SAC grant growing in real terms, or a rising percentage of a grant held constant in real terms. The growth of a number of major organisations, each dependent upon SAC for an indispensable proportion of their total revenues, necessarily pre-empt a substantial and possibly growing proportion of the Council's total grant. Only substantial growth of the total grant in real terms will prevent the major organisations from encroaching on the residue available for the multitude of smaller or less expensive activities supported by the Council. Table II shows the Council's grants

to its 15 major clients for 1978-79 and 1977-78. These organisations receive about 65% of the Council's budget.

Table II

GRANTS TO MAJOR ORGANISATIONS BY THE SCOTTISH ARTS
COUNCIL FOR 1978-79 AND 1977-78

	1978-79	1977-78
Scottish Opera	£1,368,000	£1,130,000
Scottish Ballet	570,000	480,000
Scottish National Orchestra	440,000	368,000
Scottish Philharmonic Society	180,000	128,000
Edinburgh Festival Society	260,000	230,000
Royal Lyceum Theatre	250,000	210,000
Glasgow Citizens' Theatre	190,000	167,000
Perth Repertory Theatre	81,000	70,000
Pitlochry Festival Theatre	85,000	69,000
Dundee Repertory Theatre	92,000	77,000
Byre Theatre, St. Andrews	26,000	26,000
Traverse Theatre Club, Edinburgh	81,000	60,000
Eden Court Theatre, Inverness	55,000	48,000
MacRobert Centre, Stirling	64,000	58,000
Third Eye Centre, Glasgow	125,000	90,000
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	£3,867,000	£3,211,000
Total budget	£5,950,000	£4,950,000
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Percentage of SAC's total allocation	64.9%	64.8%

Note: The total turnover of these bodies exceeds £8,000,000, so that the Council's contribution is slightly less than half their costs.

It is often argued that the existence of these large organisations and their heavy claims on SAC's resources prevent the Council from assisting a much larger number of individual artists and small organisations. In this context it should not be forgotten that SAC receives 3% more of ACGB's overall grant than the strict ratio of Scotland's population would permit at least partly in order to support these large organisations: this, of course, is 25% of the whole of the SAC grant. The initial problem with these large organisations is whether you have them at all or not. If you decide to have them, then, given present levels of government support for the arts, it is almost unavoidable that a substantial proportion of the available resources should be devoted to them. In each of these organisations, SAC's

contribution is currently decisive: without it they could not continue.

Leaving aside, however, the question of whether there actually is a substantial number of unsupported individual artists or organisations of an acceptable level of artistic achievement in Scotland at present, the case for devoting so high a proportion of the available resources to a limited number of major organisations is often not fully appreciated. Those who oppose the allocation of resources on this scale to a small number of large organisations should consider the probable state of the Scottish cultural life without an indigenous opera company, symphony orchestra, etc. The only live music of this kind available to Scotland would come from visiting orchestras and opera companies, and then only to the extent that money was available to subsidise visits, and that schedules permitted time for visits. It must be remembered that Scotland possesses neither a single large modern concert hall of the kind which symphony orchestras are used to playing in in places like London, Manchester, Croydon and Sheffield, nor an opera house capable of accommodating an audience of more than 1,600 or an orchestra of the size really required for, say, Wagner and Strauss: these limitations amount to a positive disincentive to visiting companies, however much they are tolerated by the resident companies.

The opera companies and orchestras are based in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and their principal regular series of performances are necessarily confined to the four major cities. If it is assumed that audiences are willing to travel no more than ten miles, these venues, therefore, already make opera and orchestral concerts available to well over half the population of Scotland; and if audiences will travel further (and in many cases they do, as the subscription list of Scottish Opera indicates), then an even higher proportion of the population is served by these venues. Medium-scale opera or orchestras can, moreover, perform in smaller centres, and places like Stirling, Inverness, Ayr and Elgin receive periodic visits from some of these organisations. Most of the major companies have hived off small touring groups that perform even more widely: Scottish Opera have spawned Opera for All for this purpose; the Scottish Philharmonic Society, the Scottish Baroque Ensemble; and Scottish Ballet, Moveable Workshop. But at the end of the day,

there will remain a residue of population still without easy access to any kind of live music of the highest quality. The population of some parts of Scotland is sparse and widely scattered and it would be unreal to suppose that it could ever be an economic proposition to take opera or orchestral concerts to it.

More important to the musical life of Scotland, however, is the effect of the sheer presence of 200-250 full-time professional musicians involved in these organisations whose salaries represent the greater part of the grants allocated by SAC. These posts form an important element in the hierarchy of career opportunities for professional musicians in Scotland. Without the opportunity to earn the livings in Scotland provided by these organisations, aspiring professional musicians must emigrate to earn a living. These musicians form an invaluable core to the body of instrumental teachers: without them, instrumental tuition, the foundation of the musical life of any country, would be incalculably poorer. Finally, many of these musicians — orchestral players and singers — form themselves into small chamber ensembles or offer their services as soloists to provide the concerts organised by Scotland's one hundred arts and music clubs: without these soloists and groups, the clubs would have to import more of their concerts more expensively from south of the Border. These arguments apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to much of the support for ballet and drama provision in Scotland.

It would be short-sighted, therefore, to abandon support for the large, centrally based organisations in pursuit of a wider dispersal of limited resources: some increase in provision in the rural areas might result, but it would be at the cost of the overall quality of artistic life in Scotland generally. Money spent in the Central Belt or major cities ultimately benefits the whole country; or, to put it another way, money not spent on the major organisations in these areas would damage, if not destroy, much of the cultural life of the whole country.

But it remains a fact that the large organisations are expensive and that the inflation of their costs in recent years has probably posed the largest single problem confronting the SAC. In the world of arts administration it is commonly asserted that arts costs have tended to inflate faster than prices generally. Attempts have been made to demonstrate this statistically, but

the measures employed have not been very satisfactory. The problem of financing the major arts organisations in Scotland in recent years has therefore been one of comparative rates of inflation. Costs have risen at rates largely outwith the control of the companies. Most of the companies have lacked the courage to push up ticket prices as fast, or have claimed to "know" that elasticity of demand for their product was such that to raise ticket prices as fast would only result in falling box office revenue. The ability of SAC, on the other hand, to make good the widening gap was dependent upon the rate at which ACGB's grant from the Government increased from year to year. In addition, there were each year, of course, many new projects looking for support, and the need has been for some increase in the level of the annual grant beyond that necessary to maintain at least the existing level of activity by the major companies. The long run of the whole post-war period has, in the event, witnessed a very substantial "real" increase in the grants provided by successive governments, though there have inevitably been some years when the increase in the annual grant has done no more than cover the inflation of costs of existing activities, as well as years when it has not even done that. In view of all these problems, the amazing fact is that, with very few exceptions, the basic operations of the major organisations in music, ballet, drama, art exhibitions and festivals have both been provided for and permitted in many instances to expand; and that at the same time new activities — some quite large-scale and therefore expensive — have been encouraged by SAC support to start. Among the latter are the Scottish Youth Theatre, the Scottish Photography Group, and the new Festival at Easterhouse in Glasgow.

Quantity is one thing, but the public also looks for some assurances about the quality of the activities supported from taxation. Are the musical compositions commissioned with Arts Council money good music? Do the small literary magazines supported really provide a forum for distinguished poetry? Are the exhibitions that so frequently mystify the public the work of gifted artists or charlatans? Who judges, and by what criteria? The Arts Council's problem is rendered no easier by the fact that in many areas it is necessarily dealing with contemporary art: it is today's composers, artists and writers they are supporting, not yesterday's, and the process of sorting the wheat from the

chaff has not been achieved painlessly with the passage of time. In these areas, judgement is difficult and not bound by old conventions; it is better when it is informed, but must remain subjective. The Arts Council can only seek the most informed advice, which it does through expert panels, and try to keep an open mind. Tax and ratepayers and their guardians in central and local government, on the other hand, can afford the luxury of prejudice and closed minds. To absorb the inevitable friction, the Arts Council must interpose itself in the no-man's land between the *avant garde* and those who pay for it. This "buffer" principle is an essential safeguard if any sort of artistic freedom is to be preserved from direct political control.

The considerable achievement of both maintaining the major opera, theatrical and orchestral companies and supporting new and often adventurous developments has been possible, of course, because successive "Ministers for the Arts" have persuaded their governments to provide liberal annual increases that have, in the majority of years, overtaken inflation. But it has also been possible because central government is not the sole source of public support for the arts. In recent years, for example, there has been a move towards support for the arts from industry and commerce. Most of the major arts organisations in Scotland have succeeded in securing some financial support from this sector, while Scottish Opera has recently been particularly successful in enlisting Scottish-based insurance companies as sponsors for new productions of large-scale works. A door has been opened here which it is hoped will lead to a much closer collaboration between the worlds of business and the arts. At present, however, in relation both to total arts revenues in Scotland and to the business resources themselves, the support from this quarter is minimal.

It is to local government that the arts must principally look for partnership with SAC. Local authorities at both district and regional levels are empowered to employ money from the rates for this purpose, and many have set up Leisure and Recreation Committees since re-organisation whose remit includes support for the arts. Since re-organisation, too, Scottish local authorities have created the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). COSLA, which does not publish any annual reports, and about whose activities surprisingly little is publicly known, acts as a forum for the discussion of matters

of common concern to local authorities and for the co-ordination of policy at national level. So far as the arts are concerned, this has involved agreement to a basic recommendation that the Regions should accept responsibility for local government support to the national arts organisations, and the Districts for local organisations. There was further agreement to recommend that Regions should set their contributions to each of the national organisations at fixed sums per 1,000 of their populations. This schedule has some importance since it is inevitably regarded by most authorities as a maximum. Since, however, it is also not a minimum, different authorities actually offer varying proportions of the COSLA recommended schedule, some falling a long way short of the recommended contributions.

Thus, at the absolute level, there tend to be wide variations in the contribution of Scottish local authorities to the arts. At the bottom end of the scale, support is minimal. Places seldom or never, for obvious reasons of geography and facilities, visited by the main companies see little immediate advantage to them — in spite of what has been suggested above — in supporting national organisations firmly anchored to Glasgow and Edinburgh, while it is abundantly clear, even to the most culture-conscious councillor, that "there are no votes in opera". At the other end of the scale, some authorities have responded to the call to support the arts with vision and generosity. At the risk of appearing invidious, reference should be made to Edinburgh District's support of the Edinburgh International Festival; to the Highland Region's operation of the Eden Court Theatre; and to the support for Scottish Opera from both Strathclyde Region and Glasgow District. Inevitably the major arts organisations, partly as a consequence of their history, and partly through the chance of their location in this or that region or district, have widely varying experiences of local authority support. The Scottish National Orchestra, for example, as a matter of policy, and also on account of its long history of performance in the major centres, has been particularly successful in persuading local authorities to support it. At the other extreme, however, the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow has so far failed to elicit any substantial local government support.

As is well known, the re-organised local authorities (and with them COSLA) were born just in time to experience the chastening economies of expenditure cuts forced on them by

central government. In the face of competing claims for local government expenditure in fields like housing, education and social work, it was not to be expected that apparently less urgent areas like the arts would be able to hold their own. Nor did they: by 1978 the COSLA recommended schedule had stood at the same level in money terms for three years, representing a reduction in real terms of 30% or more. Though there have been some exceptions, most authorities have accepted this guidance from COSLA, while not following it in respect of absolute levels. The resultant shortfall in local government support has had the most drastic effect on most of the major organisations, and it is not too much to say that the serious financial situation they find themselves in at present arises almost wholly from the decline in real terms of local government support. Those, like the Scottish National Orchestra, that had been most successful in the past in enlisting local government support have in consequence been the hardest hit. Both the companies themselves and SAC have been strenuous in their endeavours to persuade COSLA and its member authorities to make good the losses, but the pressures on the local authorities by central government understandably make it difficult for them to respond.

The partnership between local government and SAC in the support of the arts in Scotland, while never a partnership of equals, has thus faltered in recent years. This gave added impetus to an enquiry, initiated by SAC in 1974, which resulted in a report on *The Arts in The Scottish Regions* (SAC, Edinburgh, 1976). It followed this up by appointing in 1977 a Regional Development Director with a remit to establish close links with local authorities and to explore every possible way in which local authorities and SAC might collaborate in developing provisions for the arts in all parts of Scotland. It remains to be seen how the local authorities will respond to this initiative. In the meantime the Arts Council itself is under informal pressure from the Government not to use its resources merely to fill the gap left by declining local government support: it is feared that to do so would simply reduce the pressure on local authorities and encourage them further to withdraw their support. Since the decline in local government support is justified by the expenditure cuts forced on them by central government, this advice is rather unhelpful.

While it is easy to conclude from these recent trends that the arts in Scotland are going through something of a crisis at the moment, it would be exaggerated to do so. Though the acute financial problems of many of the arts organisations in Scotland have led to endless agonised discussions round the tables in Charlotte Square and elsewhere, aid to the arts has never been more plentifully supplied than at present. Several major companies have very serious worries about the future, and all are working below capacity and within the tightest budgets; but actual collapse has so far never been closer than just around the corner.

The ultimate uncertainty at the moment for the future of the arts in Scotland, however, arises out of the prospect of devolution. The Bill presently before Parliament will pass responsibility for government support of the arts from London to Edinburgh. Beyond that nothing is known, or is likely to be known for some considerable time after an Assembly is set up, since support for the arts is unlikely to be high in the order of priorities of problems of re-organisation to be tackled by the Assembly. Under an Assembly, SAC could hardly remain a committee of ACGB. Nor would an Assembly necessarily be tied to the present "arts council" type of administrative structure, though most of those with experience of the administration of state aid for the arts believe that it would be unwise to dispense with the "buffer" principle. If the Assembly decided to retain an arts council, however, it would be free to think out its constitution *ab initio*. Here the political colour of the Assembly would have some bearing: there is nothing sacrosanct about the present form of membership and the Labour Party, for example, has recently issued a policy statement, *The Arts and the People*, expressing support for a rather elaborate "representative" structure. Nor is an Assembly tied by any commitment to maintain present scales of state support for the arts. Finally, there is the question of the relations of any Scottish arts council with the future with ACGB, or the English Arts Council as it must become. There may possibly be some scope for a federal British Arts Council. At present, however, SAC's links with ACGB are close and invaluable: it would be a very foolish Assembly that cut these.